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ABSTRACT

When a writer quotes from or paraphrases someone else's text he or she is performing--consciously or unconsciously--a political act, situating him/herself somewhere between personal authority and other, sometimes alien authorities. Rather than being encouraged to examine their attitude toward the use of sources, students are too often taught that using quotations is a mechanical exercise. The result is that students' papers often make halfhearted and submissive gestures toward a secondary source, using quotations in a way that enshrines the words of a "great writer." Most rhetorical handbooks, unfortunately, merely describe and give examples of the conventional ways to use quotations or paraphrases. They do not illustrate a process of using quotations and paraphrases, allowing students to see how to get there from here. They fail to acknowledge that the act of paraphrasing is an act of interpretation. This effectively situates student writers as outsiders, alienating them from the source material they attempt to use and from their own texts. By inviting students to recognize the varied and sometimes contradictory voices that make up academic and other forms of discourse, teachers can empower them to reach for, as M. M. Bakhtin says, "languages and not language." Designing writing assignments that invite students to enter into a critical, dialogically informed encounter with assigned readings, can help them to gain a better sense of how they and other writers create meaning in their texts. (PRA)

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Kathleen Ann Kelly

# 'Languages and Not Language': The Writer, the Text, and the Quotation

When a writer reaches for the words of another (by incorporating quotations, fashioning paraphrases, and using informational footnotes), she performs an act fraught with political and cultural implications.

Rather than being encouraged to examine their attitude toward the use of sources, students are too often taught that using quotations is a mechanical--and even violent--exercise. Note how often teachers advise students to "insert" or "stick in" or "plug in" quotations into their essays.

Yet perhaps these teachers are describing the practice of documentation more honestly than textbooks that simply advise students to incorporate quotations into their texts. Like the terms "insert" and "plug in," the Latinate "incorporate" presumes that a student has a finished text to which quotations need to be added. The bigger problem with a term like "incorporate" is that it softens or glosses over the manner in which students are being instructed to invade their own texts.

The result of this kind of advice is that our students' papers all too frequently make halfhearted and submissive gestures toward a secondary source, using quotations in a

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way that enshrines the words of a "great writer." The authors of such papers generally believe that they are doing the right thing--after all, they are paying homage to authority, and they are drawing a clear distinction between their own words and the words of another.

What prevails in most rhetorics and handbooks and classroom discussion is what I call the "discourse of documentation"--:

1) language that Bakhtin would call "unitary language"--that is, a system of linguistic norms (The Dialogic Imagination 270). This language simply describes the conventions for the various ways writers can use quotations and paraphrases in their own texts, and

2) the language of texts produced by those writers who have tried to follow such conventions. This language is characterized by patched-together strings of quotations that can undermine, contradict, or wildly diverge from the writer's intentions and purposes; by clumsily introduced or poorly explicated quotations; by inept paraphrase--or worse, paraphrase that reads like plagiarism--and by dull, lifeless prose, hostage to the authority of source material.

Because this language is a set of conventions, it does not illustrate a process of using quotations and paraphrases. This discourse does not allow students to see how one gets there from here. It's one reason that students helplessly read a text over and over, looking for a way in,

looking for something to hook on to, and say they can't "find" a "good" quotation. This discourse presents a monologic analysis--that is, what Bakhtin characterizes as "acknowledg[ing] only one single language and a single authorial individuality expressing itself directly in that language" (265). But using sources is really a dialogic process, a process that has a good deal more play to it than textbooks represent.

As Phillip Arrington in a recent article on paraphrase puts it, "[students] haven't been taught how to paraphrase, only that they should, or hell's to pay" (193). Recently, a colleague reinforced this notion. He said, "using quotations isn't political--I don't think it's too much to expect a little common sense and an understanding of Aristotlean logic from our students." And that's precisely the point--too often, as my colleague demonstrates, the use of citation, or, more accurately, the demand that it be done, creates insiders and outsiders, invokes or priveleges one authority over another--without saying so.

The development of the conventions of documentation is a history of property rights, and, as such, is a social project. Formal citation, or "scholarly bricklaying," as Derek Price calls it in Little Science, Big Science, came into common use around the middle of the nineteenth century, first in scientific writing, and then in other discourses (64-65).

Citation became an institutionalized part of academic discourse, and, as such, took on significance in itself. The philosopher Karl Popper calls the body of information to which documentation the "third world" of knowledge--separate from internalized knowledge and empirical knowledge. As such, cites convince us that a topic exists in the first place (Bazerman 371). As Jerome R. Ravetz says in Scientific Knowledge and its Social Problems, "the citation of the source of materials used in an argument implicitly places that source in the argument" (256). Another commentator on citation, Henry G. Small, sees cited texts as symbols for ideas: "the author is imparting meaning to his 'sources' by citing them . . . The language pointed to by the footnote number . . . constitutes the author's interpretation of the cited work" (328).

Stop for a moment: think about how you have come to know this, and know this tacitly. Think about how you manipulated cites as a part of "dissertationese," or "thesak," and think about how you have outgrown the need to do so. How did you learn this?

Most of our students, when they sit down to write a research paper or documented essay in freshman comp, have been conditioned not to think about the intellectual or social or political implications of citing one's sources. Who can blame them? Most of the writing texts on my bookshelf seem almost as unaware of these implications as my

students--especially of the social and political implications.

For all their commitment, or apparent commitment, to process, textbooks still too often (as Mike Rose has pointed out) present writing as product, as static--as done, and we think this is particularly true of those sections and chapters on citation in rhetorics and handbooks.

Here's an example, which I'll leave uncited:

> Quote only the quotable. Quote for color; quote for evidence. . . . Quote what is vivid or memorable or questionable, strange or witty. Paraphrase the rest.

It's cleverly written, of course, but terribly unhelpful. A novice writer is likely to think to herself: how the heck do I know what's "vivid" or "questionable"?

The actual language of the textbook is only part of the problem. It is the presentation of the information on documentation that causes difficulty as well. Most textbooks assume students are already insiders, familiar with and willing to conform to the conventions of the academy. Citation is presented as an exercise in mechanics, as mere afterthought, and consigned to the back pages of composition texts--the placement is eloquent enough.

Not surprisingly--and I'm not being critical here--the Chicago Manual of Style and the MLA Style Manual assume initiated audiences. But rhetorics and handbooks are

supposed to be for the uninitiated. However, the process, the metacognitive activity of documentation, is missing from these texts. For example, while we recognize that the act of paraphrasing is an act of interpretation, too many of the textbooks we surveyed fail to acknowledge this. There are exceptions, of course, but we don't want to name names--we invite you to do your own survey, preferably with your students.

I think that this discourse of documentation strips the use of quotation and paraphrase of its social significance by suppressing the student's awareness of participating in a dialogue with the text or texts she is reading and the text she is trying to write.

For our students, from speech communities in which oral spontaneity is valued and the discourses are many and varied, the "genre" of the documented essay restricts their rhetorical options considerably because they don't see the sources as other people they can talk to. They see sources as something to get over--they see quotations as ornamentation rather than as organic parts of their texts.

And at times, because students have not been steeped in academic discourse for as long, or as thoroughly, as we have been, they have a kind of freedom to do subversive, sometimes startling things with quotations. They deliberately push against the conventions that we associate with citation, and what they do in these instances might

strike us as being dishonest, ludicrous, infuriating, refreshing, provocative, brilliant, or some combination thereof. I think we should pay close attention to these moments in our students' texts.

Part of the problem with the skills-and-drills approach to the research paper is that teachers, in describing or defining what they mean by "research paper," make it out to be a monologic entity governed by fixed conventions. We want our students to appreciate the diversity of options that one has at every step of the writing process, and we hope that they will come to enjoy making the choices that a writer has to make. But when it comes to using sources, we load them down with rigid, stifling guidelines--usually in aid of making writing "easier" for students. But, as Nicholas Coles and Susan Wall argue in "Conflict and Power in the Reader-Responses of Adult Basic Writers," the language of the academy is not monolithic, but multiple and changeable (299). It seems to me we ought to allow students to discover this for themselves.

Because writing is a way of learning, our students' writing often contains contradictions. Complicating writing by assigning the documented essay only exaggerates these contradictions. But this is a good complication--students may feel keenly a gap between themselves, the text they are reading, and the text that their instructor yearns for them

to produce. They ought to be given a chance to examine that gap. George Dillon argues that

> certain circumstances seem to sensitize writers to the boundaries of their own discoursing . . . In general, certain situations are dialogically 'hot,' such as those in which one culture or speech community or interest group confronts another. (69)

This sure sounds like the classroom to me.

I am suggesting that one way to undermine the tyranny of the quotation is to introduce students to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia--that is, to the conditions--the socially-constructed and/or determined conditions--under which meanings shift and are shaped by context--which itself changes. In other words, we should introduce students to real language, academic and nonacademic.

We can help students revise the thinking they do between reading source material and using source material so that they can resist and transform what we have been calling the discourse of documentation. If we can design writing assignments that invite students to enter into a critical, dialogically-informed encounter with assigned readings, we think we will help them gain a better sense of how they and other writers create meaning--intentionally or inadvertently--in their own texts. As John Edlund points out in "Bakhtin and the Social Reality of Language

Acquisition," our students's essays are hardly monologic: they often contain "unintentional" heteroglossia (61):

> Texts produced in moments of large-scale ideological restructuring are likely to appear fragmented and contradictory, as are texts that attempt to accommodate authoritative discourse that has not been assimilated. . . . syntactic and grammatical stumblings, as well as rhetorical failures, [can be seen] as possible manifestations of ungoing social and cognitive processes, rather than deficiences of skill. (64, 67)

You may not want to assign readings in Bakhtin to your students, but you might get pretty close to it by assigning a dialectical notebook and allowing time in writing and in the classroom for metacognitive discussion.

And, of course, we need to become more aware of our intrusive metaphors for the act of documentation, and acknowledge them--discuss them with our students, in fact.

When a writer quotes from or paraphrases someone else's text, she is performing--consciously or unconsciously--a political act, situating herself (to paraphrase Bakhtin) somewhere between her own authority and other, sometimes alien, authorities. A discourse of documentation effectively situates student writers as outsiders, alienating them from the source material they attempt to use and from their own texts.

By inviting our students to recognize the varied and sometimes contradictory voices that make up academic and other forms of discourse, we can empower them to reach for, as Bakhtin says, "languages and not language." Bakhtin continues:

> Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakir's intentions; it is populated--overpopulated--with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (294)

Let's stop overpopulating our students' texts with our intentions and allow students to express their own.

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